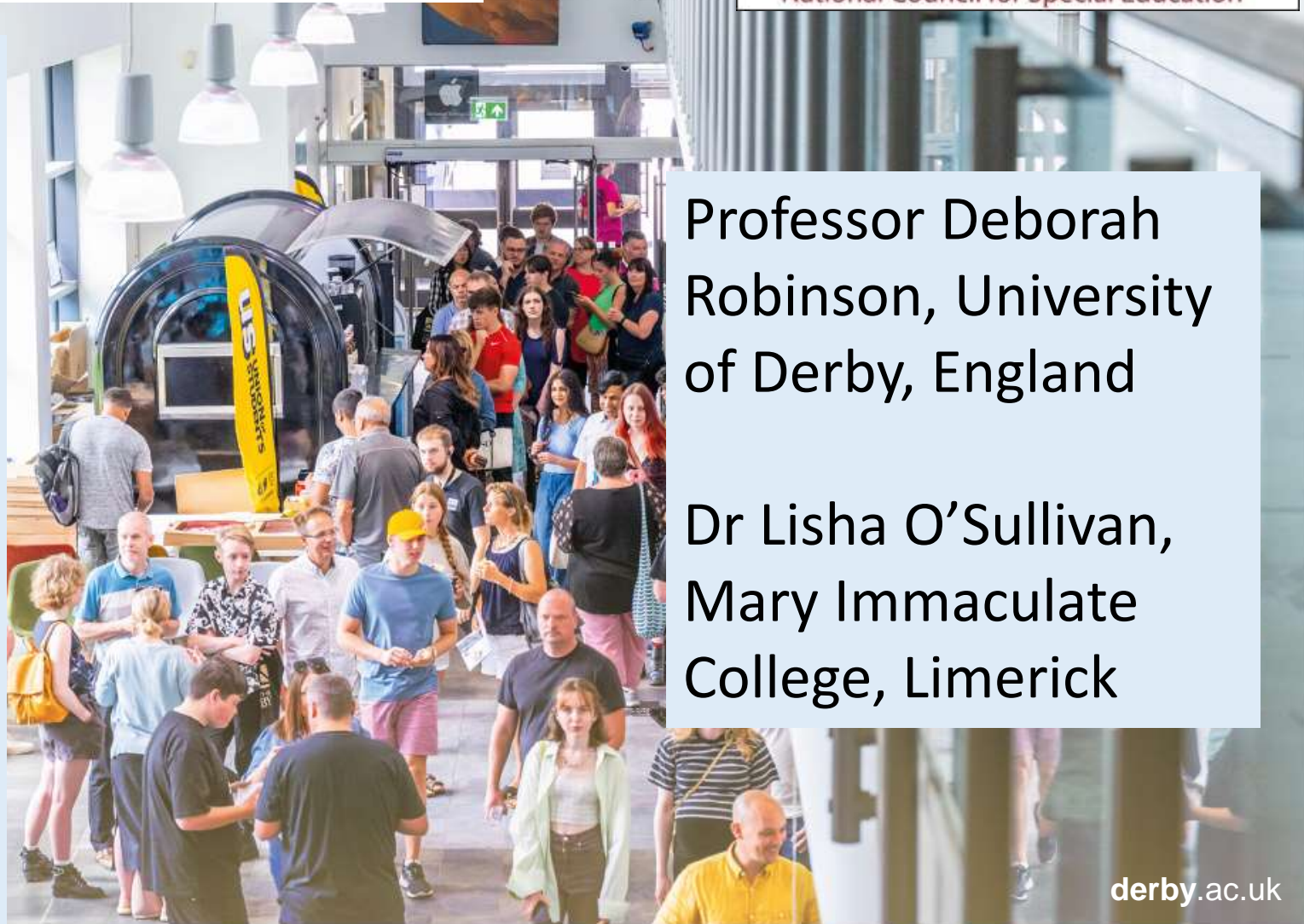




IFF Research



Stakeholder views on the NCSE – Initial findings from an independent evaluation of the NCSE frontline services



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Introductions



Prof. Debs Robinson D.robinson@derby.ac.uk

Professor of Special Educational Needs, Disability and Inclusion
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Career long interest in inclusive practice for SEN in mainstream schools.

Dr Lisha O'Sullivan Lisha.OSullivan@mic.ul.ie

Head of Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood
Studies

Career long interest in inclusive practice and professional development
for inclusion.

Research focus for the independent evaluation



What is the impact of NCSE frontline services from the perspective of stakeholders?

- Parents/carers
- Pupils
- School staff
- NCSE service deliverers

Impacts explored: wellbeing, access to education, quality of education, inclusion, participation, progress & development, parental engagement, professional development of school staff.

- **Also explored:** stakeholder perspectives on communication, relationships, and collaboration.

Research focus for the independent evaluation



The commission was delivered by the University of Derby Consortium

- University of Derby, Derby, England
- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland
- IFF Research Ltd, London, England

Timeline

- Commissioned by the NCSE in September 2022
- All data collection is complete and has been analysed.
- The draft report on findings is due to be submitted at the end of December 2023.
- We are still in the process of refining our findings and interpretations
- Today we are reporting the initial findings

What is meant by 'frontline services' in the study?

Services that are most visible to beneficiaries in their day-to-day encounters with NCSE staff, services and processes.

- Special Educational Needs Officer (SENO)
- Visiting Teacher Service (VTS)
- NCSE In-School Advisory Service
- Special Education Teacher (SET) and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) allocations and exceptional reviews
- Applications and allocations for transport, equipment and home tuition
- Teacher Professional Development
- NCSE website
- NCSE guides and resources for parents/carers and schools

Research Design

Method 1

Literature Review

What is the policy and practice landscape that NCSE frontline services operate in?

44 sources

Method 2

Online Survey

771 parents/carers

558
school staff

1,329

Method 3

In depth semi-structured interviews

12 parent/carers
12 school staff
9 NCSE service deliverers

33

Method 4

Case studies
of schools and individual children within those schools

9 schools
9 children

Over 1400 participants

Phase 1

Contextualisation
September to
December 2022

Phase 2

Distance Field Work
Instrument design, piloting and
implementation April 23 to June 23

Phase 3

Face to Face Field Work
April to September 23

Research Design: Case Studies and the engagement of Teacher Researchers (TRs) as co-researchers

- Eliminating the gap between those who generate research (researchers) and those who apply the research in practice (teachers).
- Teacher Researchers have credibility in fieldwork sites.
- Teacher Researchers are attuned to the acoustic of practice.

TR Preparation Programme Overview

Session 1: Introduction to the Project

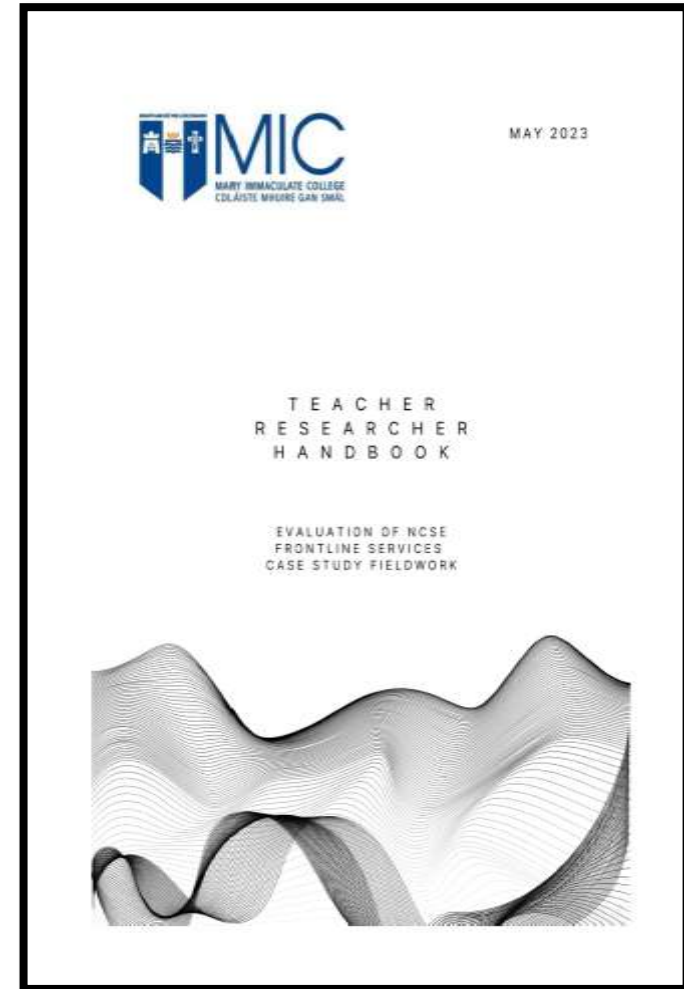
Session 2: Instrumentation for Case Studies: Interviews and Conversations with adults

Session 3: Instrumentation for Case Studies: Participatory Encounters with Children and Young People (CYP)

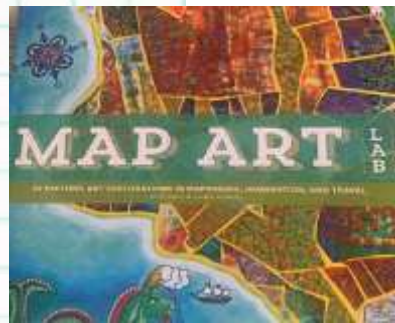
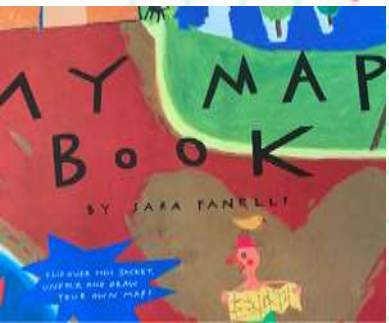
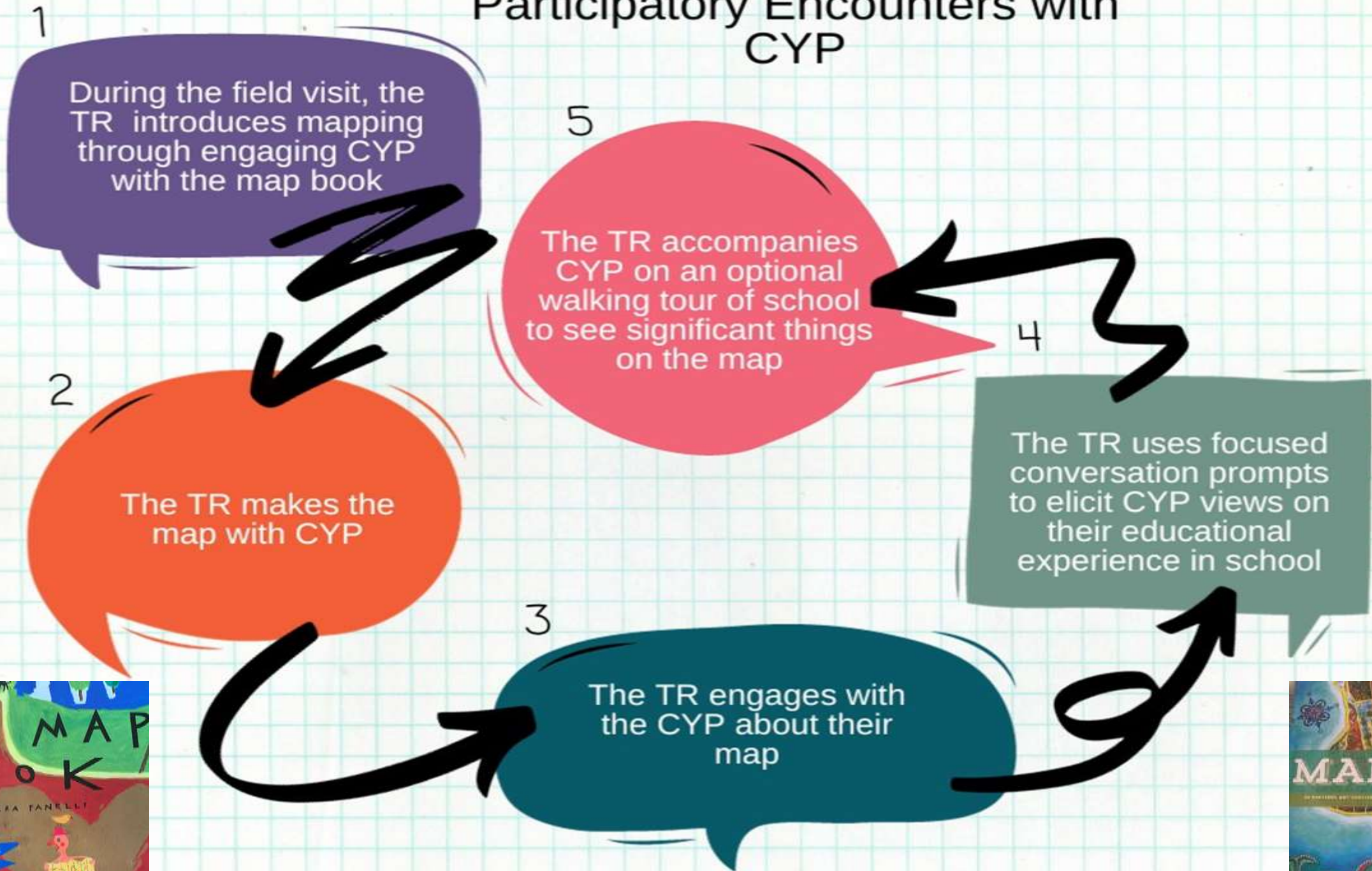
Session 4: Preparing for fieldwork

Session 5: Working with Fieldwork Data

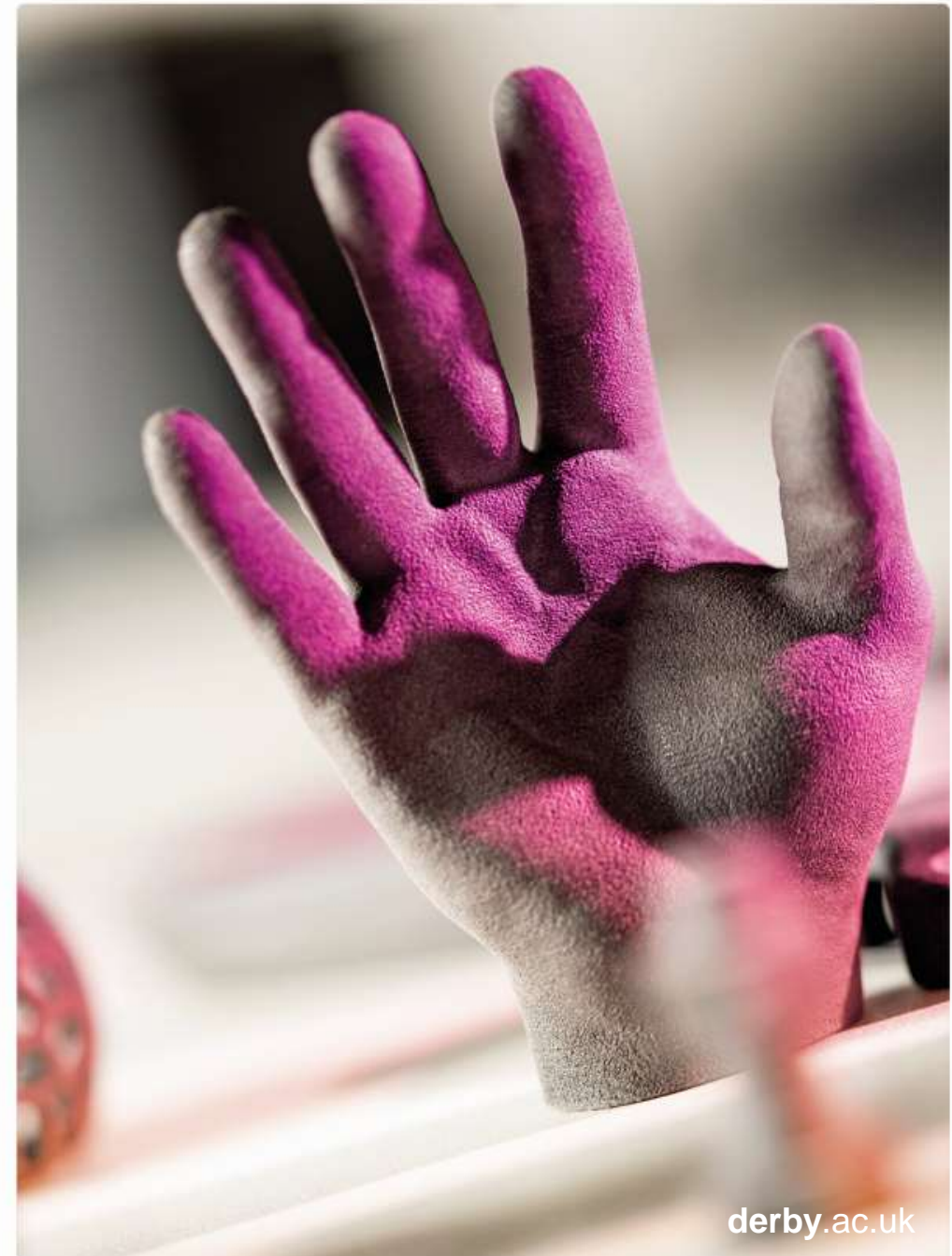
Research Design: Case Studies and the engagement of Teacher Researchers (TRs) as co-researchers



Participatory Encounters with CYP



Initial Findings



About the findings

- The findings are reported thematically
- We use magnitude descriptors across types of data as follows:
 - **All** – 100%
 - **Most** – 76% to 99%
 - **Majority** – 51% to 75%
 - **Some** – 25% to 50%
 - **A minority** – less than 25%
 - **Very few** – one or two participants only.



Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data

Impact as perceived by stakeholders

Descriptions of impact

Process-schema dominant over impact-schema

Communication & relationships as mediators of sentiment

Crucial role of the SENO and School Staff

Sustained, personalised relationships and their value

Communication Continuum from **responsive** to **isolating**

The right support, in the right place at the right time

The value of the additional supports enabled/delivered by the NCSE's frontline services

Perceptions of sufficiency/insufficiency of **capacity** and **support**

Bureaucracy as a mediator of sentiment

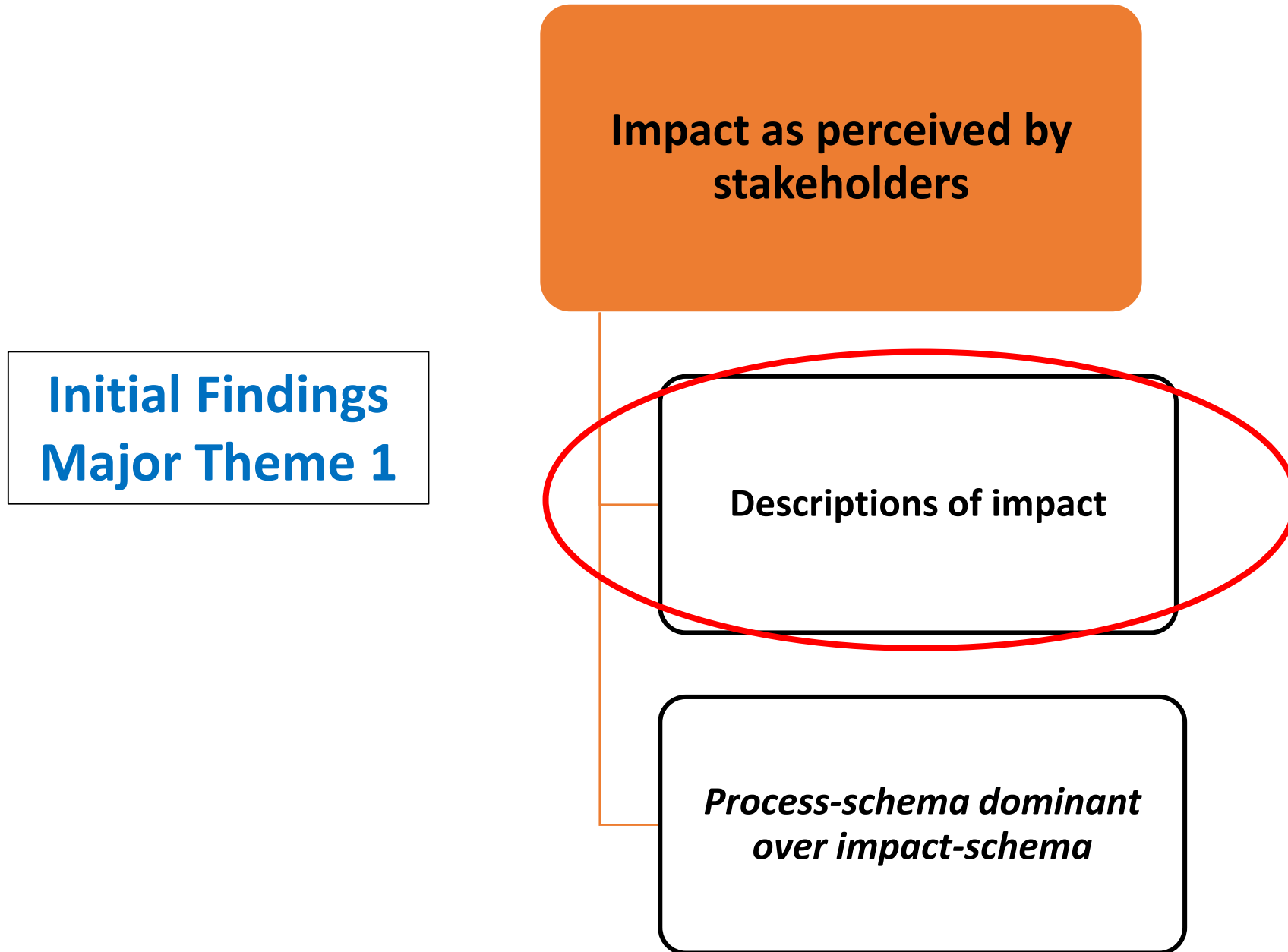
Collaboration and (mis)understanding

Mutuality, trust and collaboration

Knowledge of the NCSE and Public Relations

Major themes and Sub Themes

Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data



Theme 1: Impact as perceived by stakeholders



Survey of parents/carers

- The majority of parents/carers responding in the survey perceive NCSE frontline services as providing significant benefit to their child overall.
- For respondents reporting a significant benefit overall, a majority listed the following as benefiting their child significantly:
 - Visiting teacher service
 - School transport
 - Additional resources (e.g., technology)
 - Allocation of SNAs, SETs and Home Tuition
- The majority of parents report that the SENO has supported them and their child well.

Theme 1: Impact as perceived by stakeholders



Survey of parents/carers

- For parents/carers reporting receipt of a service, the majority perceive the service as leading to **improved access to education**.
- The majority of parent/carers reported that VTS and SENO support in allocations of SETs, SNAs and additional resources had led to **improved educational progress** and in the case of SNAs, **improved wellbeing**.
- The majority of parent/carers reported that the VTS and SENO support in reviewing/allocating SNAs had led to **improved inclusion**.

Our child is in mainstream school learning with his peers learning to socialise make friends and be included and he's thriving, his speech is better [parent/carer, free text comment, survey]

Theme 1: Impact as perceived by stakeholders



Survey of school staff

For the subset of respondents confirming interaction with the NCSE, a **minority** perceived that there were benefits in the areas listed in the survey:

- Knowledge of how to support children/students with Special Educational Needs
- Confidence in working with children with Special Educational Needs
- Methods and processes in respect of Special Educational Practice
- Methods and processes in respect of Inclusive Practice

Theme 1: Impact as perceived by stakeholders



Interviews with parent/carers

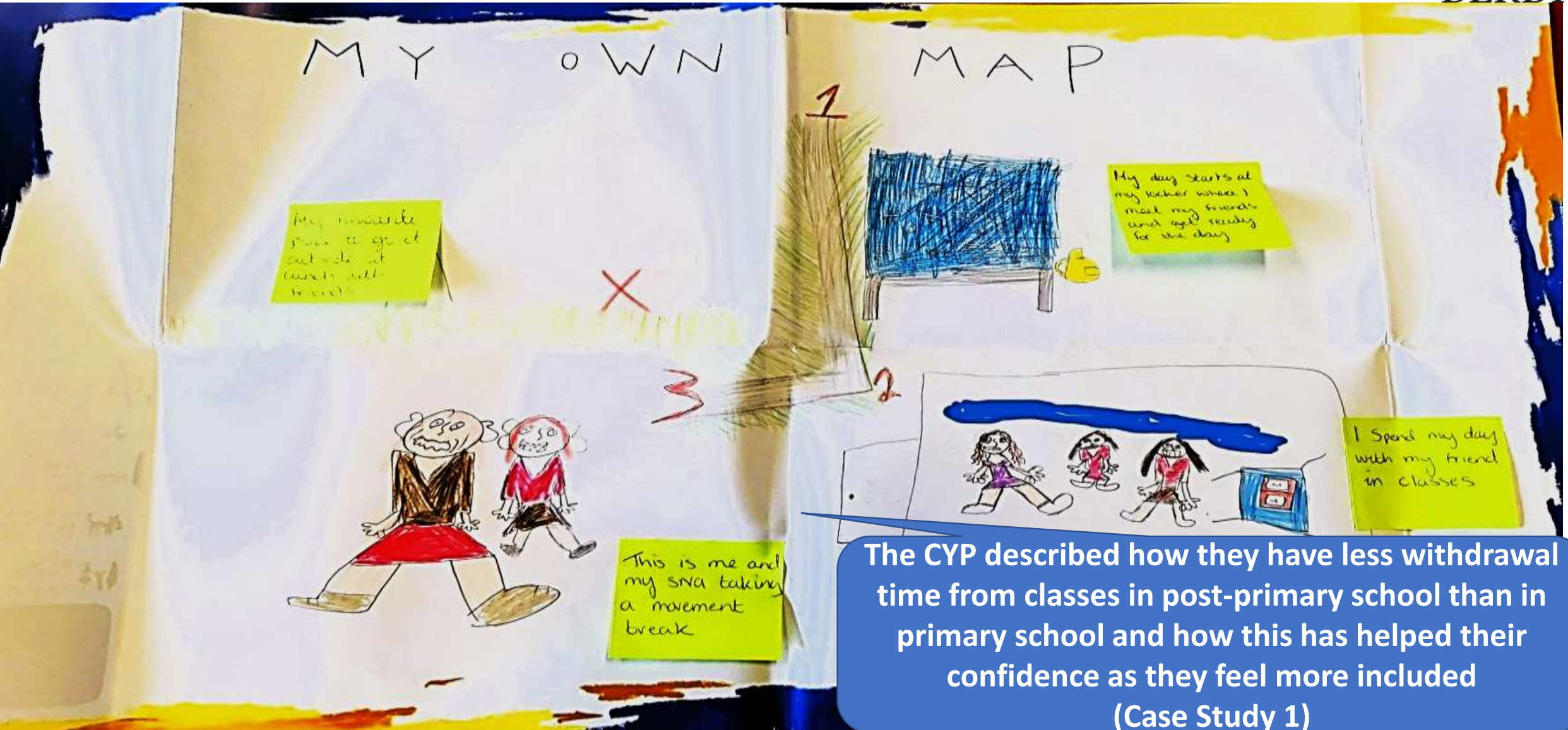
Parent/carers spoke positively about the impact of NCSE frontline services on the **progress of their children** and their **enjoyment of school**.

Like he hated writer's workshop and now he's going to write a book when he's older. just the teacher changing the attitude towards the fact that he can't write perfectly, and he can't draw perfectly because of dyspraxia and hypermobility doesn't mean that his drawings aren't valid [Interview, parent/carer talking about impact of advice from NCSE advisor]

- Even the most critical parents/carers acknowledged the progress their child had made because of the NCSEs frontline services.

Theme 1: Impact as perceived by stakeholders

Case Studies: Participatory encounters with CYP



The CYP described how they have less withdrawal time from classes in post-primary school than in primary school and how this has helped their confidence as they feel more included (Case Study 1)

Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data

Initial Findings
Major Theme 1

Impact as perceived by stakeholders

Descriptions of impact

Process-schema dominant over impact-schema

Theme 1: Process-Schema dominant over Impact-Schema



- When participants were talking about their perceptions of the NCSE, **process-schema** were more dominant than **impact schema**.
- We use the term schema to describe the mental models found in long term memory used to organise information about the world, constructed by our experiences and situated in wider discourse.
- We are not sure why process-schema dominate, but the content of data in other themes (e.g., bureaucracy as a mediator of sentiment) offer potential explanations.

Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data

Communication & relationships as mediators of sentiment

**Initial Findings
Major Theme 2**

**Crucial role of the SENO and
School Staff**

**Sustained, personalised
relationships and their value**

**Communication Continuum
from **responsive** to **isolating****

Theme 2: Crucial role of the SENO

Survey of parent/carers

- In the survey, support from the SENO was identified as a service leading to positive impacts for their child (e.g., receipt of school transport, additional resources, SET and SNA allocations) by the majority of parents.

Interviews with parents/carers

- In qualitative data (survey and interviews) surveys, SENOs were mentioned rarely, with more focus on support from school staff, and other services

Theme 2: Crucial role of the SENO

School staff (interviews)

- School staff perceived the SENO to be crucial to the school's success in gaining additional resources, and in understanding the NCSE and what might be available.
- **Sentiments about the SENO service and its impacts were mixed but mostly positive.**
- Positive sentiment arose when the SENO was perceived to be experienced, engaged with the school (e.g., responsive and in regular contact, knew the school well), knowledgeable about SEND, and flexible.
- School staff talked about how much they relied on the SENO, and the risks of this reliance.

Theme 2: Crucial role of the SENO

My SENO is very supportive and advises me with the paperwork that I submit, and it doesn't mean I always get them (resources that is), but I don't want to miss out on anything that I am entitled to and getting them.....well that has a direct impact on the school and the resources the pupils should have because we know we how to go looking for them...the role of the SENO within the NCSE is huge and I think its carried out extremely effectively, in our case here anyway (interview, school staff)

You only have one SENO you deal with....in whatever region you're in. Like, that's the person you have to deal with. You can't go to somebody else. That's the person that's dealing with your school. And they're allocated to your school. So [if] there's not a good relationship there, it's a challenge (Interview, school staff)

Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data

Communication & relationships as
mediators of sentiment

Initial Findings
Major Theme 2

Crucial role of the SENO and
School Staff

Sustained, personalised
relationships and their value

Communication Continuum
from responsive to isolating

Theme 2: Sustained, personalised relationships with NCSE frontline staff, and their value.



- Across the data, we can observe that parents/carers and school staff hold positive sentiments toward NCSE frontline services and their impact **when they experience**:
 - Regular prolonged contact with a service or individual from that service.
 - Support that is continuous and responsive to the school's/child's needs.
 - Working with NCSE staff who know and understand their child/their pupils/their school.
 - A personalised relationships
- Concomitantly, they hold less positive sentiments when they do not experience these kinds of relationships.
- In surveys and interviews school staff narrated the value of face-to-face contact and visits to the school.
- In Interviews, most school staff communicated their yearning for more face-to-face contact between NCSE staff and school staff and say they have experienced a reduction of this over recent years.

Theme 2: The Communication Continuum

Easeful communication
Regular contact
Timely follow up
Face to Face contact
Person to Person relationships

An experience of struggling alone to find a way through the system or a crisis
Slow or no response to emails and enquiries
A sends you to B and B sends you back to A (pillar to post)

Responsive

Isolating

..if I need support, I go to the SENO and she can put me in touch with the support services that are appropriate to my need at the time...I go through her generally and [the response] is quite timely [School principal, interview]

We had bare minimum contact, very unhelpful information, no assistance accessing supports in mainstream school and no help in finding a suitable school placement. Stopped taking calls and never returned emails and appalling service [Parent/carer, free text comment, survey]

Responsive

Isolating

The majority of parents and school staff identify communication as an important area for development

Theme 2: Communication and relationships as mediators of sentiment

Case studies

The CYP's parent is extremely satisfied with the educational experience of the CYP. Contact is usually through the school and not directly with the NCSE. However, the parent has confidence in the schools links with the NCSE and their relationship with the SENO and is satisfied that should resources be needed that the school, in consultation with the NCSE will seek these resources for the CYP (Case Study 1)

For the most part the face of the NCSE, for many people, is that of the SENO (Case Study 3)

The principal describes contacting the SENO for advice on a situation and being told to contact the NCSE. However, they were not directed to a particular individual and mentioned that they do not "even know where or who I was supposed to contact" (Case Study 9)

Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data

**The right support, in
the right place at the
right time**

**The value of the additional
supports enabled/delivered by
the NCSE's frontline services**

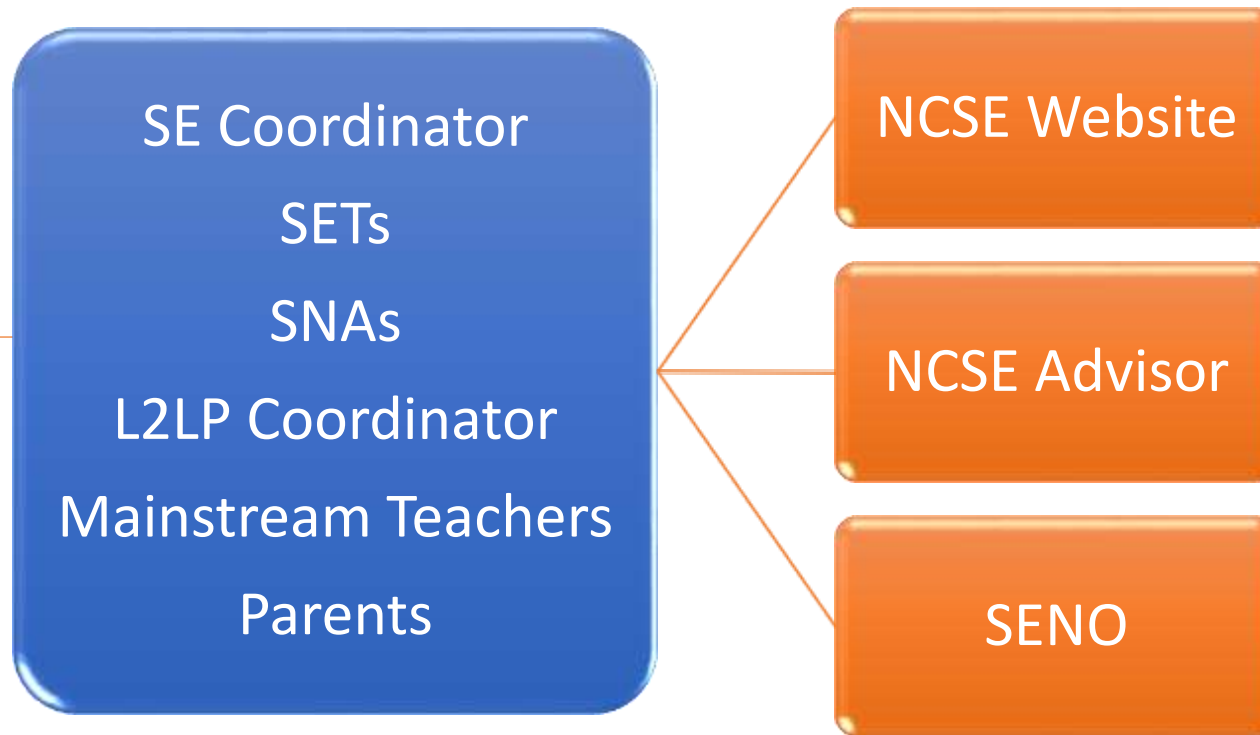
**Perceptions of
sufficiency/insufficiency of
capacity and **support****

**Bureaucracy as a mediator of
sentiment**

**Major themes
and
Sub themes**

Theme 3: The right support, in the right place at the right time.

Case studies



It was agreed by participants that the **frontline services benefited all students** not just those with special educational needs and that by providing these supports, best practice was being followed and as a result **all students were being supported well.**

Theme 3: Perceptions of sufficiency and insufficiency of support

Case studies

Across the data we observe that perceptions of sufficiency and insufficiency are mediated by the level of need and support.



Sufficiency

Insufficiency

Having an umbrella figure like the NCSE just gives confidence all round for us
[Interview School Principal]

The needs seem to be getting greater and greater in the classes and we are not getting any more supports...it is very limited the supports (Interview SEN Coordinator)

Theme 3: Bureaucracy as a mediator of sentiment

Case studies

Across the data (and in the case studies), we can observe experiences of bureaucracy contributed to negative sentiments toward NCSE frontline services.

- Administrative load
- Navigating the online application system
- Transparency around decision-making processes
- Engagement in decision-making
- The impact of administrative processes on planning
- The impact of administrative processes on CYP and staff

Throughout the school community a palpable sense of anxiety about staff allocation was conveyed in both informal interactions and during interviews with various stakeholders (Case Study 3)

If the school are saying that additional supports are required, then there shouldn't be excessive scrutiny on that. The less bureaucracy there is between the school and the NCSE, then the more benefit (Parent Interview)

Theme 3: Bureaucracy as a mediator of sentiment

Across the data

We can observe that the bureaucracy was a mediator of sentiment for parent/carers, school staff and NCSE staff.

Survey (School staff)

A minority of respondents perceived the experience of working with the NCSE as 'easy'

A minority of respondents reported that overall, they were satisfied with the support offered by the NCSE to their school.

I don't apply for resources much anymore as the application process is too stressful and onerous [School Leader, Survey]

[The application process] added another layer of bureaucracy to a process and added additional stress to the situation [Parent/carer, Survey]

Theme 3: The value of additional supports enabled by NCSE frontline services



The Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) is highly valued by parents/carers and school staff.

Surveys

- Parent/carers were most likely to report that the VTS provided a significant benefit to their child.
- Most parents/carers thought that the VTS had supported them and their child well.
- The majority of school staff perceived support from the VTS to be valuable.
- Praise for the VTS was relatively frequent in free text comments and in interviews.

Our visiting teacher has been outstanding. Especially when my daughter was first diagnosed as I was completely clueless how to help her and access any services for her. Every child needs a visiting teacher in their corner to help them as a parent is very overwhelming to always to be struggling to navigate the school system.

[Parent/Carer Survey, free text response)

Theme 3: The value of additional supports enabled by NCSE frontline services



The NCSE advisory service is valued by school staff

Surveys

- The majority of school staff perceived in-school advice to be valuable.

Interviews

- Most participants who had experienced this service were positive about its quality and impact.
- NCSE advisors were considered knowledgeable.
- The support and advice provided by them was perceived to be relevant and useful.

Our visiting teacher has been outstanding. Especially when my daughter was first diagnosed as I was completely clueless how to help her and access any services for her. Every child needs a visiting teacher in their corner to help them as a parent is very overwhelming to always to be struggling to navigate the school system.

[Parents/carer survey, free text response]

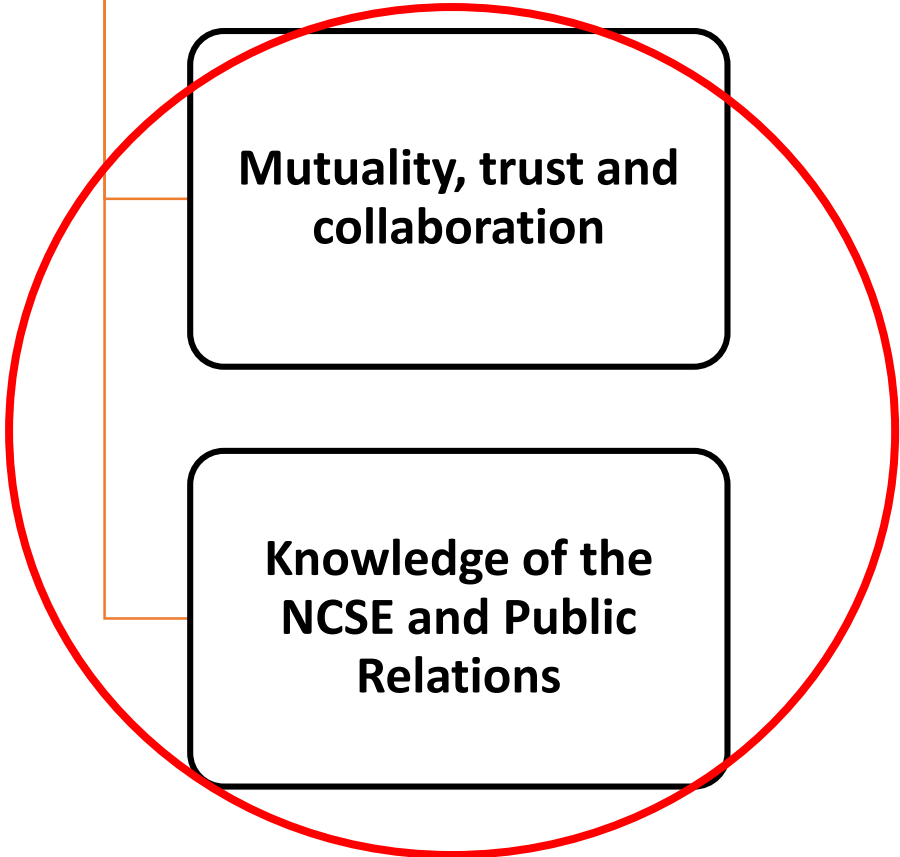
Thematic Map arising from analysis of the corpus data

**Collaboration and
(mis)understanding**

**Mutuality, trust and
collaboration**

**Knowledge of the
NCSE and Public
Relations**

**Major themes
and
Sub themes**



Theme 4: Mutuality, Trust and Collaboration

Across the data, participants perceive a lack of trust and clear accountability between actors in the system:

- SEN is perceived to be a political football
- SEN has the attention of the media and both schools and the NCSE garner negative coverage which feels exposing.
- Principles perceive a lack of trust in their judgement about need from the NCSE
- Staff in the NCSE are not sure that schools or other services understand where the NCSEs responsibilities end and where the responsibilities of others (schools, other services) begin.
- We can observe in interviews with school staff that they are unclear on who has responsibility, and some parents/carers told us about a 'pillar to post' experience.

Theme 4: Mutuality, Trust and Collaboration



But there is a desire among most school staff and NCSE deliverers for more mutual and collaborative ways of working.

- Participants would like a culture of listening, collaboration and trust across actors in the system.
- Participants would like a culture of mutual and clear accountability among actors across the system.
- All school staff and parent/carers interviewed have very little or no knowledge of how services collaborate.
- School staff find it difficult to describe how parents experience NCSE services, and what the impact on them might be.
- Some parents/carers reported a feeling of being excluded from conversations between SENOs and schools.

Theme 4: Knowledge of the NCSE and Public Relations



Many participants have suggested that the NCSE has some public relations work to do.

- In the survey, a minority of parent/carers knew about the NCSE and what it did.
- Participants perceive a need for communication and public relations so that:
 - All actors have a better understanding of the NCSEs remit, scope, decision making processes and structure.
 - All stakeholders have a fuller understanding of specific and mutual accountabilities in the system.
 - There is a growing culture of mutual responsibility and trust.

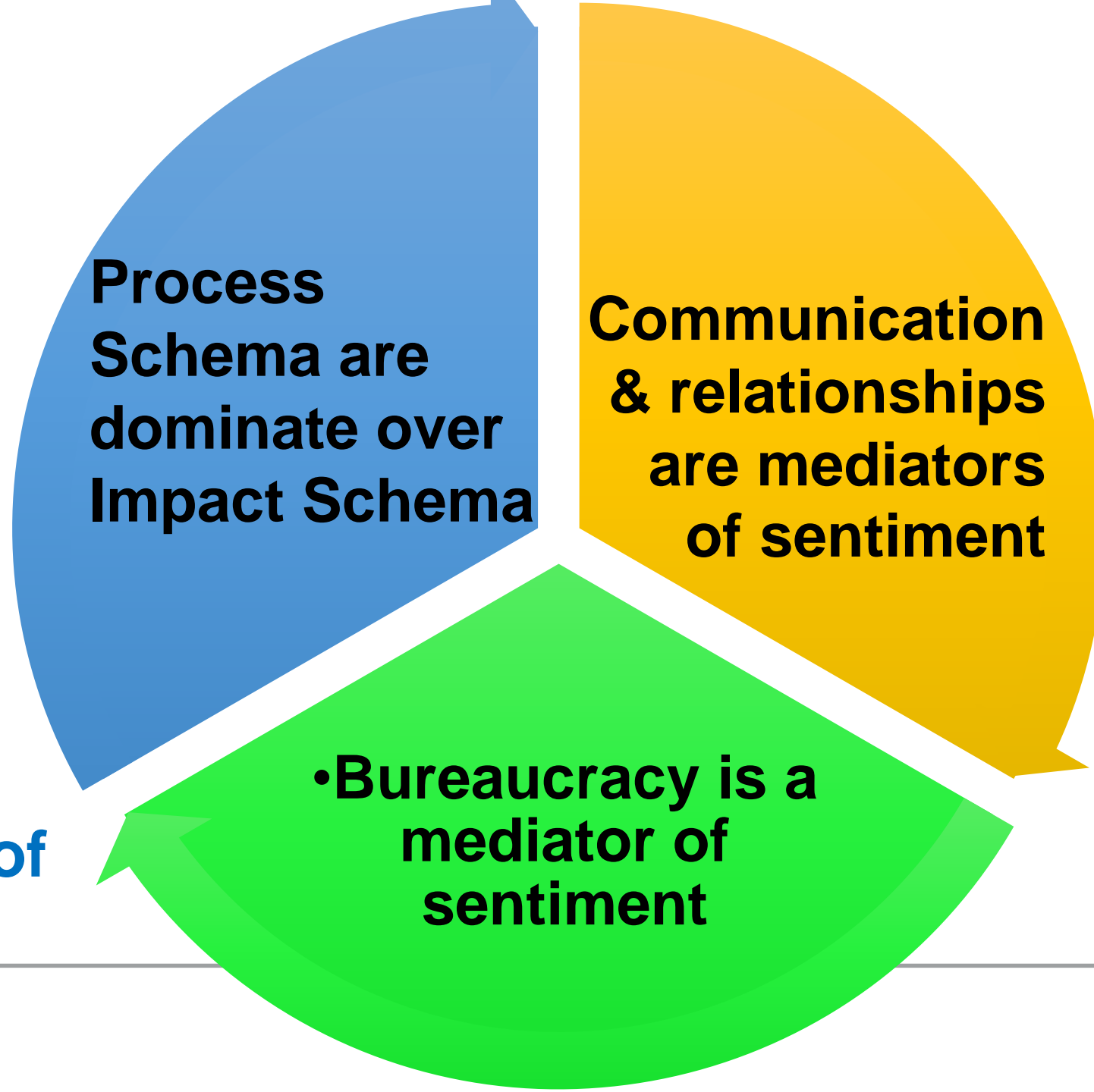
**Interim (and
tentative)
conclusions on
strengths,
phenomena of
interest and areas for
development**



Things that are going well in NCSE frontline services (interim conclusions)



- The majority of parents value NCSEs front line services and identify positive impacts on wellbeing, access to education, inclusion and progress.
- The majority of school staff value the frontline services provided by the NCSE including the VTS, the NCSE advisory services, the website, the school portal, teacher professional development services, and additional resources.
- The VTS and NCSE advisory services are very highly valued.
- The SENO role is considered crucial within NCSE frontline services
- All of the children in our case studies were experiencing positive impacts from the cumulative supports enabled or provided by the NCSE in the context of their school.
- SET allocations are considered sufficient by most participants.
- Participants identify in the NCSE, many staff who have expertise and skill of great value.
- Staff in the NCSE are committed and engaged and want the best outcomes for children and young people.



**Phenomena of
interest**

Areas for development (interim conclusions)



- Communication is an area for development identified by the majority of participants who narrate communication experiences along a continuum of responsive to isolating.
- Most school staff and parent/carers perceive some insufficiency of capacity and support in NCSE staff workloads, SNA allocations and placement availability.
- All school staff interviewed propose increases in face-to-face contact between NCSE frontline staff and schools to improve effectiveness and impact.
- Parents and school staff prefer sustained, personalised contact with NCSE frontline service staff, and those services where this happens more.
- A more trusting, collaborative and joined approach to providing support for pupils and families is desired, and parents/carers would like to be included more.
- The importance of reducing bureaucratic burden on NCSE staff, parents and school staff emerges from participant accounts of their experiences of frontline services.
- There is a need for the NCSE to engage in public relations and communication so that its remit is better understood.

The home tuition benefited us so much as a family we were able to have a tutor here to help us with toilet training, introducing learning play skills - it was having education for my son but also for us to learn too.

[It's great] to see my child grow and learn and be in line with his peers. The look of pure joy on his face when he achieves a something in school to the level of his peers.

Our child is in mainstream school learning with his peers learning to socialise make friends and be included and he's thriving, his speech is better.

My child would never have been able to access mainstream education without access to transport, as school in local area has no special class

He is happier and doing much better because he is now able to access the curriculum more successfully.



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THANK YOU



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
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